



ALESSANDRO SBORDONI 2024-07-24

## REALITY NEVER WINS: AN INTERVIEW WITH THE SILENT MAJORITIES

NECROPOLITICS BAUDRILLARD, ELECTION, SIMULATION, TRUMP, WRESTLING

*In this interview, we talked about Donald Trump, the spectacle of American politics, and the end of reality.*

**Alessandro Sbordonì:** There are people who think that Donald Trump is an ignoble politician. But Donald Trump is not a politician any longer. He is only the sign of the spectacle.

**Silent Majorities:** Yes, there ain't no politics no more. *There ain't no reality no more.* Even when things get real crazy and reality irrupts into the virtual, like with a shooting or something with an AR-style rifle, it doesn't bring back the real. If Donnie Trump kept acting and staying "in character," it's 'cause that's all he is: ain't nuthing else but the character. You can take out a

living thing, but you can't kill an *image*...

**AS:** It is the same in the ruling spectacle of *Idiocracy*, the science-fiction and dark comedy film starring Terry Crews as the President of the United States. In the near future, politics and culture are supplanted by idiocy and violence. We are watching the sequel in real time even before it is out.

**SM:** That movie ain't no sci-fi flick no more. In the year 2506, the President of the United States is an ex-porn star and wrestler who rode his fame to the politicking scene. This shit is like fiction and reality playing the same ol' game *once again*: first time around it's a dark comedy, second time it's an epic story. Now, when Hulk Hogan says, "Let Trump-a-mania make America great again" and tears off his shirt at the Republican National Convention, he's just showing how there ain't no difference between reality and fiction no more. And that's epic, brother. Even history has the structure of fiction.

**AS:** Do you think the election of Donald Trump is somewhat similar to Hulk Hogan winning the world champion title?

**SM:** In 1957, Roland "Rowdy" Barthes writes that the dichotomy between true and false wrestling is indifferent to the audience who "is completely uninterested in knowing whether the contest is rigged or not [...]; it abandons itself to the primary virtue of the spectacle, which is to abolish all motives and all consequences." When it comes to a sport like boxe, y'all know, that's a Jansenite sport where only the best of the best matters. But when it comes to wrestling, well, that's a whole 'nother story. When Hulk Hogan loses against the Italian Stallion in *Rocky III*, it ain't 'cause he ain't a tough one. No, it's 'cause Rocky Balboa's the star of the show, y'all know, so he oughta win. "One can bet on the outcome of a boxing-match: with wrestling," Rowdy Barthes writes, "it would make no sense."

Back in 2007, Donald Trump jumped into the ring at Wrestlemania for the *Battle of the Billionaires*, taking on World Wrestling Entertainment's big shot Vince McMahon. But it was clear as day that the folks weren't rooting for Vince, the corporate fella.

**AS:** The spectacle already knows the winners of the *Battle of the Billionaires*...

**SM:** Again, in 1984, when Hulk Hogan went up against The Iron Sheik, he was fighting the "bad guy" too. Mr. America against Mr. Arab, as simple as that. This ain't just a *mythological* show, it was also a political one. The only thing that sets him apart from the bad guy is who gets booed by the crowd.

That's the same ol' story all over again. "Well, let me tell you something, brother," says Hulk Hogan. "When I came here tonight, there was so much energy in this room. I felt maybe I was in Madison Square Garden getting ready to win another world title [...]. But what I found out was I was in a room full of real Americans, brother, and at the end of the day, with our leader up there, my hero, that gladiator, we're going to bring America back together." And then he talks about the re-election of Donnie "The Wall" Trump: "All you criminals, all you lowlifes, all you scumbags, all you drug dealers, and all you crooked politicians need to answer one question, brother. Whatchya gonna do when Donald Trump and all the Trump-a-maniacs run wild on you, brother?" The stages ain't different no more, only the rules of the game are now really those of epic history instead of a mythical *Commedia dell'Arte*.

**AS:** What is the difference between Hulk Hogan and Donald Trump then?

**SM:** Let me tell you this, brother. In wrestling parlance, a *shoot* is things that ain't staged: it's the real thing. It's the opposite of *kayfabe*, which is all about keeping up the act that the show is real for the audience and shit. Hulk Hogan at the Republican National Convention ain't Thunderlips no more, he's Terry Gene Bollea. Got it? But Donald Trump, well, he's always just ol' Donnie Trump. Look at the big man: he's throwing up that right fist at his rallies like he did at Wrestlemania's *Battle of the Billionaires*. But Trump-a-mania ain't Hulkmania. It's more than a mythology, *pace* what Rolie Barthes says. If there's still a stage out there, it's just there to cover up the fact that all the United States of America is a stage.

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In his essay *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities*, Jean Baudrillard writes that on the same night Klaus Croissant was extradited, France played in order to qualify for the World Cup. A few hundred people (including Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault) demonstrated in the street against the extradition by the government, while twenty million people watched the France national football team win against Bulgaria. Back then, the spectacle was and, according to Jean Baudrillard, will always be preferred over politics.

But now, there is no longer any difference between the two. If the rise of Donald Trump is no longer resistible, it is because there is no longer any difference between the silence of the majorities and their loudness. Hulk Hogan is only the last *stage*, in the double sense of the word, of the analogy between the politics of the spectacle and the spectacle of politics.

Italian media tycoon and politician Silvio Berlusconi, the precursor of Donald Trump, already showed it thirty years ago: earlier than *idiocracy* there was Silvio Berlusconi's *videocracy*. Tomorrow, it might be something much worse.

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Judge, Mike (dir.). *Idiocracy*, Ternion, 2006.

Stallone, Sylvester (dir.). *Rocky III*, United Artists, Chartoff-Winkler Productions, 1982. **Alessandro Sbordoni** was born in Cagliari in 1995. He is the author of *Semiotics of the End: On Capitalism and the Apocalypse* (Institute of Network Cultures, 2023) and *The Shadow of Being: Symbolic / Diabolic* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Miskatonic Virtual University Press, 2023). He is an Editor of the British magazine *Blue Labyrinths* and the Italian magazine *Charta Sporca*. He lives in London and works for the Open Access publisher *Frontiers*

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